

Promotional Event Ideas and Publicity Tips

Click the “Community Events” link on the **Recovery Month** Web site at <http://www.recoverymonth.gov> to check for local and national events that are taking place.

National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month) offers an opportunity to recognize people in recovery, their families, and those who help them and to encourage others to seek treatment. Bring **Recovery Month** to life in your community this September by organizing a special event to raise awareness about recovery and addiction issues. **Celebratory and educational events**, such as recovery walks and town-hall meetings, draw

attention to substance use disorders and garner support from members of your community, including legislators, families, teachers, friends, and the media.

Recovery Month Online

This year marks the 20th anniversary of **Recovery Month**, presented by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA’s) Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This year’s campaign is expanding its reach to today’s online world. The modes of communication have evolved, making interaction and the exchange of ideas more accessible and convenient than ever before. As new technologies have developed, so have the ways people use them to communicate. From 2003 to 2007, the **Recovery Month** Web site, <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>, itself has grown 212 percent.

The 2009 theme, “*Join the Voices for Recovery: Together We Learn, Together We Heal,*” emphasizes the need to use all available resources, in our communities and on the Internet, to educate people and their families about the disease and to help those with substance use disorders, and those close to them, get support. It also celebrates the power of community support and understanding. By opening a dialogue about the harmful effects of alcohol and drug addiction on families, friends, and communities, we can provide hope, healing, and better help those struggling with substance use disorders embark on a successful journey of sustained recovery.

This year, plan your **Recovery Month** activities by using popular online mediums – as well as traditional channels – to arrange and promote community and media events. The following section, “Promotional Event Ideas,” outlines traditional community events, as well as online **Recovery Month** activities. The subsequent section, “Publicity Tips,” offers ideas for promoting your events in your community and to the local media. SAMHSA has provided event examples, tips, and suggestions for planning and publicizing events, as well helpful online resources throughout this document.

Sample Events for Offline and Online Audiences

Tailor the following event examples to fit your community’s needs, and refer to examples of previous celebrations at the **Recovery Month** Web site. Consult the subsequent section of this document for information about how to publicize your event to encourage community members to attend.

Arranging Community Events

Hold a town-hall meeting or local rally to engage community members in your effort. Invite local legislators and leaders into a discussion about improving treatment and recovery services and providing access to them. Use these events to introduce people to local treatment providers and support groups, while offering general resources and information about substance use disorders, treatment, and recovery. Follow these steps to plan for such an event:

- **Meet with those who will be valuable in your event coordination** – To get the ball rolling, sit down with potential **Recovery Month** partners, such as local businesses, local government agencies, key leaders, organizations, and media partners who share an interest in your **Recovery Month** effort. Based on your numbers and manpower, decide how large your event can be and how many people you will need on hand to help.
- **Hold a planning meeting** to establish speakers and moderators to participate in your panel discussion, organize material creation and distribution to attendees, select and book a venue based on the size of your event, outline your publicity and media outreach plans (see the “Publicity Tips” section of this document), coordinate staff and volunteers, and make other accommodations, such as handling media requests or recording the audience’s comments.
- **Identify** the issues that are important to your community when it comes to addiction and recovery, and research other **Recovery Month** or **related events** taking place in your area to **schedule your event date and time around those activities**. This allows you to collaborate with other organizations, reach a wider audience, and increase your chances of being referenced in the media. Find other events posted at <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>.
- Have your town-hall meeting or other event take place somewhere that is **accessible, accommodating**, and **politically neutral**, such as a school, university, or community center. Select a venue that is centrally located, with parking or transportation available. Ensure that your location can support your audio equipment, media stations, and facilities for participants.
- **Develop materials** that will be distributed on-site, which are targeted to the community’s current addiction and recovery landscape as well as its needs for recovery services. You want to **make the issue relevant for the citizens** in your area and convey that everyone is working together to bring about change, a solution, or legislation.
- **Approach possible business partners** within the community, as well as influential civic leaders and personalities, who could potentially participate in your event or help finance and raise community interest in your event. Also, reach out to local organizations that might be interested in supporting your endeavors. Refer to the **Recovery Month fundraising guide** for additional support.

“**Meetup.com**” is an Internet community that helps groups organize offline events. It is the world’s largest network of self-organized clubs and community groups that can help you:

- Find others in your area who share your interests
- Learn, teach, and share ideas
- Make friends and have fun
- Rise up, stand up, unite, and make a difference
- Be a part of something bigger – both locally and globally

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- **Set up tables, chairs, and a check-in table** prior to your event. Arrange a sign-in sheet, agenda, refreshments, and other materials before your meeting.
- Before your event, **provide special guests, participants, and hosts with a “run of show”** that will help them prepare for the day. Arrange an informal prep session for the panelists an hour before your event, remembering that they will need to arrive in advance of the event.
- **Check all audiovisual and special equipment** the day before your event and again an hour before it begins to ensure that everything is working properly and that the **appropriate people have been instructed** about what to do should a technical problem occur.

A listserve is an electronic mailing list of targeted members or outlets you want to reach. Visit <http://www.listserve.com> for more detail on listserves.

Arranging Online Events

Digital channels are expected to contribute to 80 percent of media usage by 2020. There are many different ways you can bring **Recovery Month** events to the online community. For example, create an online event to get community members involved in the discussion about treatment and recovery, and to help people obtain treatment services – and promote better access to treatment. An event hosted online, such as a Webinar, lasts for a specific amount of time and gives users a chance to interact “live” with peers and experts through video features. Target all community members, not those just directly affected by substance use disorders, by creating a forum that will allow them to share their stories and the benefits of recovery. Also, direct those already engaged in online communities, such as college students, toward resources on addiction, treatment, and recovery.

By reaching online communities and networks, you will help increase awareness of the addiction, treatment, and recovery landscape through a medium that is popular with all audiences – particularly younger people – and reach a wide spectrum of leaders in different areas. For a successful online event:

To help you plan a Webinar, online services can provide software to allow you to lead chats, answer questions, and show a presentation from your computer. One such service that you can download as a trial is **GoToWebinar**, but there are many others that you can use.

- **Prepare your Web site** (your organization’s message board or a social networking site) for activity by opening any forums to users not affiliated with the site (if you have privacy controls) and highlighting your **Recovery Month** event on your organization’s and any partners’ Web sites. Remember to provide log-in information if necessary to access the forum. Assess whether you need to upgrade your technology to be able to host the gathering.
- **Gather with key people** to get your plans moving; consider asking schools in your area to involve young people, and involve substance use disorder support programs to gauge area resources. Determine a date and time for your online event.

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- **Research** people who specialize in addiction or community members who have been or are affected by it. Schedule an expert host to moderate the event and facilitate the online discussion. Provide your featured host with an agenda and time limitations. Also offer suggested points to cover, recognizing both those already in recovery as well as those who are still in need. Let the host know who you plan to invite to participate in the event, casting a wide net to include people who may not know much about recovery.
- **Publicize your online forum** by posting announcements on various Web sites, including the **Recovery Month** Web site at <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>, and blasting an invite to a listserve of participants. Be sure to provide any needed log-in information as well as the specific date and time for your interactive discussion. See other promotional tips later in this document under “Publicity Tips.”
- **Ensure that all online features** are working properly the day and hour before your event starts. Have a protocol in place for participants should a technical error occur, and have someone on hand to tend to all technical issues.
- **Have your host open the event with a few remarks** and introduce the 2009 **Recovery Month** theme, “*Join the Voices for Recovery: Together We Learn, Together We Heal.*” Ensure that the importance of open and accurate communication and education is conveyed in their introduction. Express appreciation to those who supported and participated in your **Recovery Month** efforts.
- **After your event, direct participants to additional resources and tools.** Post an article on your Web site following your event that summarizes the forum’s questions, discussion, and purpose. Continue to follow up with participants through regular e-mail communications that include news, events, and any new resources you may have on substance use disorders.

Publicity Tips

When planning your **Recovery Month** activities, devote a portion of your time to media outreach well in advance of the event, alerting members of the media and inviting them to participate. The timeliness of your outreach is essential, as you want your event to be a success. Identify local reporters who have covered addiction and recovery-related issues in the past, and localize and tailor your outreach to accommodate their interests. Promote your **Recovery Month** events through a variety of channels – print, broadcast, and online – to help spur media interest and attention. Specific tips for each promotion type can be found later in this document or by referring to the “**Media Outreach**” section of this toolkit.

To help make your event newsworthy, your event must let reporters know that your organization is participating in the **Recovery Month** nationwide initiative, which improves upon the well-being of your community. Events that highlight the achievements of your organization and **Recovery Month** include:

- Scheduling a conference or forum to discuss methods for combating addiction in your community
- Holding a ribbon-cutting ceremony and open house celebrating the establishment of a new treatment facility in your area
- Hosting a sporting event such as a **Recovery Month** run or walk
- Having your city’s mayor sign a **Recovery Month** proclamation in a public venue

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When inviting the media to cover your event, encourage broadcast outlets to air portions of it, whether live or taped, during their news reports. Read, watch, or listen to the media outlet you wish to target ahead of time to customize and regionalize your pitch. When conducting your outreach, ask yourself:

- Who and how large is my target audience?
- Does my topic have community-wide interest?
- Is this a unique occasion or has it been done before?

Also, brainstorm with other groups in the area to create a community and media-friendly event. For tips on how to partner with other organizations, please refer to the “[Building Community Coalitions](#)” piece in the “[Resources](#)” section of this toolkit.

Online Media Publicity Tips

Tap into interactive methods to promote your events and encourage your community’s participation in **Recovery Month**. A number of print, television, and radio networks host online chats with experts and prominent journalists. Contact the online editors of your local paper to see if you can have your expert messages included in their program, or if you can participate in a **Recovery Month** chat during the month of September.

Additionally, take advantage of the credible health discussions being held on online blogs, forums, and message boards. Use these channels to deliver your message to the people who can best disseminate it to the wider public, serving as ambassadors to carry your message forward. One example is [WebMD’s Mental Health and Addiction and Substance Abuse: Support Group](#) message boards.

Post event announcements on the Web sites of your supporters, sponsors, and partners, providing a link whenever your event is referenced.

Traditional Media Publicity Tips

Present information about your **Recovery Month** event and organization to reporters in the days and weeks before your event. This allows them to create a more detailed and well-rounded story. Use the following tools to help the media with their stories:

- [Tips for speaking with the media](#)
- [Press release and media advisory](#)
- [Substance use disorder background information, also known as a backgrounder](#)
- Biographical information for featured event speakers, honorees, and people with personal stories of recovery

Get to know your media outlets: each has submission deadlines and preferences; alert them well in advance of your activities. With most local television news, story decisions are usually made by managers, producers, and assignment editors during a newsroom morning meeting. Make sure your information gets to them at least a week before your **Recovery Month** celebration date.

Use large search engines, such as [Yahoo!](#) and [Google News](#), to find recent coverage of your event. Vendors such as [360 Media Watch](#) also can monitor news for a charge. Be sure to check with them well in advance of your event.

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Additionally, many news stations and newspapers have community calendars that alert the public and media of your upcoming events. Most of these Web sites have instructions on how to submit your event for posting. Announce it prior to your event date on the outlet's Web site.

Remember the importance of accuracy and be sure to keep **Recovery Month** messages in mind to ensure that you adequately convey the reality of substance use disorders when connecting with the media. For tips on developing your messages, please refer to the "Media Tips" section and consider distributing the "Guide to Help Media Accurately Cover Substance Use Disorders" document to local media outlets as a reference as they develop their stories. Accurate information helps counteract myths surrounding the disease, treatment, and recovery.

After Your Recovery Month Event

After your **Recovery Month** celebration, track the amount of media coverage your event has garnered by collecting news, audio, and broadcast clips online. Feature them in future promotional materials and post them on your organization's Web site. Before doing so, ask the media outlets and authors for permission to reprint or post any materials.

Share Your Activities and Successes

Promote your activities and share the success of your **Recovery Month** events by:

- Posting your **Recovery Month** plans on <http://www.recoverymonth.gov> to generate momentum for the campaign, which touches millions of people affected by substance use disorders.
- Completing the "Customer Satisfaction Form" to share your stories and other outreach efforts during **Recovery Month**.
- **Sending your promotional materials to:**
Office of the Director, Consumer Affairs
SAMHSA's Center for Substance Abuse Treatment
1 Choke Cherry Road, Second Floor
Rockville, MD 20857

More Resources on Recovery Month and Substance Use Disorders

Various resources exist about **Recovery Month** and substance use disorders:

- All materials from this planning toolkit and an extensive array of relevant information are available electronically on the **Recovery Month** Web site, <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>.
- Substance use disorder, treatment, and recovery information is available at SAMHSA's Web site, <http://www.samhsa.gov>, and by calling SAMHSA's 24-hour national helpline, **1-800-662-HELP**, for information in English and Spanish.
- Information on treatment options in your area and the special services available can be found at <http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment>, a portal that includes a searchable database of more than 11,000 U.S. treatment facilities and additional treatment resources.

Web sites or event examples mentioned in this document and on the *Recovery Month* Web site are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, or the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment.